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AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA

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SUBJECT: Dominica PM Calls Snap Elections for December 18

DERIVED FROM: DSCG 05-1 (B), (D)

Summary

[11](#). (C) Prime Minister Skerrit announced snap elections to occur on the 18th of December. This is ten months earlier than required, and reflects Skerrit's calculation that his advantage may be at its peak due to an influx of assistance from Venezuela and China -- both officially in terms of infrastructure projects and unofficially in (alleged) campaign contributions. The cacophony of allegations of corruption is increasing in the opposition and NGO communities, but the shortened timeline limits the opposition's ability to exploit these charges of possible wrongdoing. End Summary

To the Polls

[12](#). (C) Prime Minister Skerrit in a public meeting of the Dominica Labour Party (DLP) in Mahaut on 19 November announced that the next general election will take place on 18 December. Elections are normally held five years after the last elections, which would be May, 2010, but by rule can take place as late as five years after the first meeting of Parliament, which would be October, 2010. Nomination day was 2 December, when all parliamentary candidates were announced. The DLP has had to replace nine of the 21 parliamentary candidates. Skerrit launched his appeal to voters urging Dominicans to bring an end to the "politics of division" and move forward as a nation.

Christmas comes early this year

[13](#). (C) Ron Green, the leader of the opposition United Workers Party, told poloff November 20th that they were prepared for the election, but concerned about its timing so close to the Christmas holiday, usually a time for family and not political matters. The UWP is woefully underfunded in comparison to the DLP, he admitted, but will focus its message on job creation and integrity. The

Freedom Party run by Judith Pestaina is unlikely to capture many seats, but could play an important role among swing voters. The DLP currently holds 14 of the 21 seats, with the remaining held by the UWP.

Voting Irregularities

14. (C) According to Dr. Joseph Campbell, the local OAS representative, the government has officially requested both OAS and CARICOM observers to the election, satisfying one of the many opposition complaints about unfairness. The other prominent complaints are the lack of updated voter lists, inadequate voter ID cards, and the chartering of planes to fly in overseas voters. In the last elections, two DLP seats were won by a total of under ten votes, likely swayed by the purchasing of flights for members of the Diaspora. While citizens residing overseas are allowed to vote as long as they have been back within a five year period, their travel to Dominica has to be self-funded. According to both major opposition parties, the Dominica Broadcasting Service has also refused to take their advertisements, in direct violation of established press freedoms.

Comment

15. (C) The call for early elections was not a complete surprise, as earlier rumors had predicted their occurrence in both July and then September of this year. While there is no ironclad proof of foreign money at play in the parties, it is likely that Skerrit is receiving Venezuelan money, which he would be counting on to allow him to outspend his opponents. His assessment is probably accurate, for while many Dominicans are frustrated with the lack of jobs and integrity, Skerrit has been able to build a populist base that will be hard to counter with the limited funds available to the opposition. DLP defections and the Freedom party's connection to swing voters are the most significant obstacles standing in their way. End Comment
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